

April 11, 2021 Coffee Hour Discussion of *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*
Part Four: The Tentacles of Caste and Part Five: The Consequences of Caste

You are invited to consider these prompts prior to the virtual coffee hour. Our discussion may encompass these – or other topics. Please know you are welcome and encouraged to join us even if you have not reviewed the prompts in advance.

1) In Chapter 11, Wilkerson discusses the recent and well-publicized increase in death rates for middle-aged white Americans. Many of these “deaths of despair” have been attributed to the opioid crisis. What would media coverage of the crack and opioid epidemics have looked like in a truly equitable society? How might our systems of criminal justice and mental health have evolved differently without caste?

2) On Page 234 “If one of the requirements of a hierarchy is that the lowest caste must remain the scapegoat, on the bottom, the culture works to keep it that way by playing up the stereotypes that affirm their lowliness and minimizing indications to the contrary.”

How has your perception of America’s inner cities been formed and in what ways can you see how the news media is portraying African-Americans today who live in the inner cities? Cite some examples.

3) On page 207, Wilkerson ends Chapter 19 saying:

“... the enemy, the threat, is not one man, it is us, all of us, lurking in humanity itself.”

Through the UU 1st principle we covenant to **affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person**. In her Reflection on the First Principle (www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles/1st), Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker, says:

Reverence and respect for human nature is at the core of Unitarian Universalist (UU) faith. We believe that all the dimensions of our being carry the potential to do good. We celebrate the gifts of being human: our intelligence and capacity for observation and reason, our senses and ability to appreciate beauty, our creativity, our feelings and emotions. We cherish our bodies as well as our souls. We can use our gifts to offer love, to work for justice, to heal injury, to create pleasure for ourselves and others.”

Consider the statements from Wilkerson and Parker quoted above and notice your reactions to them. Reflect on the idea of “both/and” rather than “either/or” as you think about these statements.

- What are some ways the 1st Principle can guide us in our response to inequities perpetuated by systems of hierarchy?
- What are some ways that our UU culture can lead us to create our own systems of hierarchy?